UA Consultants
In Service since 2001

GRS vs RCS Certification: Which Recycled Certification Is Right for Your Business?

A simple, side-by-side guide to help Indian manufacturers and exporters choose the right recycled content certification.

Why Recycled Certifications Matter Today

More brands, retailers, and buyers around the world now ask a simple question before placing an order: can you prove your product is really made from recycled material? This is where recycled content certifications come in. They give businesses a credible, third-party verified way to show that their raw material actually contains the recycled content they claim.

For Indian manufacturers and exporters, especially in textiles, plastics, packaging, and fashion, two certifications come up again and again: GRS (Global Recycled Standard) and RCS (Recycled Claim Standard). Both are managed by Textile Exchange and both track recycled material through the supply chain, but they are not the same, and choosing the wrong one can waste time, money, and effort. This guide breaks down the difference in simple language, so you can pick the certification that actually fits your business.

What Is RCS (Recycled Claim Standard)?

The Recycled Claim Standard, or RCS, is a chain of custody certification. Its main job is to verify and track the recycled content in a product, from the recycled input all the way to the final product. RCS confirms that a product genuinely contains the percentage of recycled material it claims, whether that is 20 percent, 50 percent, or 100 percent.

RCS is focused purely on traceability of recycled content. It does not cover social or environmental criteria like chemical use, worker safety, or wastewater treatment. This makes RCS a simpler, faster certification to achieve, which is why many businesses start with RCS before moving on to a more detailed standard.

What Is GRS (Global Recycled Standard)?

The Global Recycled Standard, or GRS, also verifies recycled content and chain of custody, just like RCS. But GRS goes several steps further. On top of tracking recycled material, GRS also includes strict social and environmental requirements at every stage of processing, including responsible chemical use, safe wastewater handling, fair labour practices, and safe working conditions for employees.

In short, GRS answers two questions at once: is the material really recycled, and was it processed responsibly? This makes GRS a more complete and more demanding certification compared to RCS, and it is often preferred by global fashion and retail brands that care about both sustainability and ethical manufacturing.

GRS vs RCS: Key Differences at a Glance

Here is how the two certifications compare on the points that matter most to a business:

- Scope: RCS only verifies recycled content and traceability. GRS verifies recycled content plus social and environmental practices at production facilities.
- Minimum recycled content: RCS certifies products with a minimum of 5 percent recycled material. GRS also requires a minimum of 20 percent recycled material in the final product, with clear labelling rules based on the percentage.
- Chemical and environmental criteria: RCS has no chemical restrictions. GRS includes a restricted substances list and requires proper wastewater and environmental management.
- Social criteria: RCS does not cover labour or worker welfare. GRS includes social criteria based on international labour standards, covering fair wages, working hours, and safe conditions.
- Certification complexity: RCS is quicker and less resource-intensive to implement. GRS requires more documentation, on-site checks, and ongoing compliance across social and environmental areas.
- Market perception: RCS is respected but seen as a basic traceability claim. GRS is viewed as a stronger, more complete sustainability certification, often preferred by premium and global brands.

Which Certification Is Right for Your Business?

The right choice depends on where your business is today and where your buyers or markets expect you to be.

RCS may be the better starting point if your business primarily needs to prove recycled content for a specific product line, if you are new to sustainability certifications and want a simpler first step, or if your buyers only ask for recycled content verification without any additional social or environmental requirements.

GRS is usually the stronger choice if your buyers are large international brands or retailers who expect responsible manufacturing along with recycled content, if your business wants a long-term, credible sustainability story rather than just a recycled content label, or if you are exporting to regions like Europe or North America, where GRS is widely recognised and often preferred over RCS.

Many businesses actually use both, starting with RCS for quicker wins and later upgrading to GRS as buyer expectations grow. It is also worth noting that GRS certification automatically satisfies RCS requirements, since GRS builds on top of the RCS chain of custody framework.

Steps to Get Certified

Whether you choose RCS or GRS, the certification process generally follows a similar path.

- Assess your supply chain: Identify where recycled material enters your process and how it moves through each stage until the final product.

- Choose an approved certification body: Both RCS and GRS certifications must be issued through Textile Exchange-approved certification bodies, not self-declared.
- Prepare documentation: Gather purchase records, transaction certificates, and process flow documents that prove the recycled material's origin and journey.
- Undergo an audit: A certification body auditor reviews your facility, records, and, for GRS, also checks social and environmental practices on-site.
- Receive your scope certificate and transaction certificates: Once approved, you receive certification documents that must be renewed annually and shown for each shipment or order that carries the recycled claim.

How UA Consultants Can Help

UA Consultants has been guiding Indian manufacturers and exporters since 2001, helping them choose and achieve the right certifications for their business goals. Whether you are exploring RCS for the first time or preparing for a full GRS audit, our team helps you map your supply chain, organise the right documentation, close compliance gaps, and prepare confidently for certification body audits. We focus on making the process practical and efficient, so your business can meet buyer requirements without unnecessary delays or confusion.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. Can a business hold both RCS and GRS certification at the same time?

Yes. In fact, since GRS is built on top of the RCS framework, a GRS-certified facility automatically meets RCS requirements as well. Some businesses hold RCS for certain product lines and GRS for others, depending on buyer needs.

Q2. Which certification is better for exporting to Europe or the US?

GRS is generally more recognised and preferred by large international fashion and retail brands, especially in Europe and North America, because it covers both recycled content and responsible manufacturing practices, not just traceability.

Q3. How long does it take to get GRS or RCS certified?

RCS certification is usually quicker, often taking a few weeks once documentation is ready. GRS certification can take longer, generally a couple of months, since it involves a more detailed audit covering social and environmental criteria along with recycled content verification.

Q4. Do I need a minimum percentage of recycled material to get certified?

Yes. RCS requires a minimum of 5 percent recycled content in the final product, while GRS requires a minimum of 20 percent recycled content, with different labelling claims allowed depending on the exact percentage used.

Final Thoughts

Both RCS and GRS play an important role in proving that recycled claims are genuine, not just marketing language. RCS offers a simple, focused way to verify recycled content, while GRS adds a deeper layer of environmental and social responsibility on top of that same traceability. Neither certification is universally better than the other, the right choice simply depends on your buyers, your market, and how far along your sustainability journey your business wants to go.

If you are still unsure which certification fits your business, it helps to start by looking at what your current and future buyers are actually asking for. If you would like expert guidance on choosing between GRS and RCS, or support in preparing for certification, UA Consultants is ready to help you move forward with clarity and confidence.